WORLD CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DURATION: 28' 0o" TRANSCRIPT AS BROADCAST

PROGRAMME: **"WORLD CHRONICLE"**

GUEST: Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the UN Secretary-General on Soviet and East European Affairs

JOURNALISTS: William Sexton, Newsday
Evgueni Menkes, TASS
Eckard Zehm, German Press Agency

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

SYNOPSIS

Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General on Soviet and East European Affairs, suggests that the current political and economic changes in Europe have already had a direct impact on the work of the United Nations. He shares his insights into the personalities of some of the Kremlin chiefs, and talks about Soviet policies concerning internal political reforms and on aid to the Third World.

"WORLD CHRONICLE" is produced by the Information Products Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA.

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Programme No. 387 Recorded on 30 March 1990

VOICE From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is World Chronicle, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's World Chronicle.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns and this is WORLD CHRONICLE.

In this edition, we'll discuss the breathtaking economic and political changes that are taking place in Europe and try to assess what effect they'll have on the world at large.

Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General on Soviet and East European Affairs, joined the Secretariat in August 1989. Before accepting his current post, he was Acting Chief of the Department for U.S. and Canadian Affairs of the Soviet Foreign Ministry. He began his foreign service career in 1956, and quickly rose to be a top-level interpreter for Soviet leaders.

Starting with Nikita Kruschev on the first U.S. visit by a Kremlin chief, he had been with every Soviet leader and worked in summit meetings with the western counterparts, including seven U.S. presidents.

We're pleased to have Mr. Sukhodrev as our guest today. He'll be interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: William Sexton of Newsday; Evgueni Menkes of Tass; and Eckard Zehm of the German Press Agency.

Mr. Sukhodrev, welcome to WORLD CHRONICLE.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Ambassador, I guess I may call you that because that was your rank before you came to the United Nations, before we get into the serious political stuff I wonder if you'd tell us a little bit about your experiences as an interpreter? You've rubbed shoulders and been the voice box and the ears so to speak of some of the most important leaders of our time beginning with Nikita Kruschev, perhaps you'd tell us a little bit about your experiences with him?

SUKHODREV: Well, I couldn't tell you about all the experiences at all of even the summits, let alone the various interesting meetings, other meetings that I have attended during my career, that would certainly double up all the time allotted to this programme and be too little still but since we are in the United Nations and the General Assembly Hall is just one floor above us it is the hall where of course one of the most perhaps unprecedented sights greeted the eyes of many world leaders during one important U.N. session and that was the leader of a great power, Nikita Kruschev, banging his shoe on the table. And just one point maybe that might be of interest. Now why did he do that? The explanation as I heard it coming from him was that he used to have a habit -- and I know that -- when he was sitting at a long meeting or an interview, many of which I attended, he would take his watch off his wrist and sort of play with it and hold it in his hand. Now at that time he was objecting to something that one of the speakers was saying from the rostrum of the General Assembly Hall, he would start to draw attention to himself and to voice his protest. He would start beating with his fist on the table and his watch was in his hand and as he explained it, once after such a table-banging session he looked at his watch to see that it had stopped. He'd broken his watch so he was so disgusted that the next time he wanted to make a protest he just took his shoe off his foot and banged that on the table. That was the explanation he gave us and very pleased he was with himself.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you believe that explanation? I guess you should not disbelieve it.

SUKHODREV: I should not disbelieve it. He showed us the watch. It was not working, it had obviously stopped.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sukhodrev, you also interpreted for the late Andrei Gromyko. He had a reputation in the United States and the West in general I guess as the so-called 'Grim Grom' because he was rather serious of demeanour but his memoirs which have recently been published give a slightly different picture. What was your impression of him? Was he more human than perhaps people gave him credit for?

SUKHODREV: He was much more human than people gave him credit for. In fact, he could at times have a very sensitive sense of humour when he was at ease, when he was sort of relaxing, not in the midst of some very important serious negotiation. He had a terrific memory and he could remember all sorts of episodes, including the smallest details from his very long and most interesting career, from his meetings with various statesmen and he would remember the humourous parts and he used to smile. He wasn't the Grim Grom all the time. He was very human.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean he was cracking jokes when he was talking to his counterparts in the West?

SUKHODREV: Well, he could. It was a humour let's say ....

LITTLEJOHNS: He wasn't a Reagan type who had a quip for every situation?

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SUKHODREV: No, he didn't but he could remember some of let's say the humourous episodes from his life, his career and he could use that and I think that let's say Dr. Kissinger in his memoirs recalls some of the late Mr. Gromyko's humour. It is was a dry kind of a dour humour peculiar to Mr. Gromyko alone.

SEXTON: Mr. Sukhodrev, we talk about the breathless events of the last couple of years. In fact though, almost everything that has happened was inevitable, all the way from perestroika to Gramm Rudman to German reunification. The real surprise was when it happened which leads me to ask you if it's also inevitable? What do you seeing happening next as the stage has been set in Europe for the East and the West and the middle countries to evolve into new arrangements?

SUKHODREV: Well, I think that basically the situation which you have now and which you can look forward to having for a long time, certainly for a very long time to come, is an end to the division of Europe into opposing military blocs. That is first and foremost and I think is the most momentous change of all because from there you go on to all the other corollaries. It is from there that you go on to the economic transformation of Europe, it is from there the ending of a division into opposing hostile military blocs, that as a practical proposition you start talking about a common European home and you start talking about the possibilities of having a kind of economically united Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals. It's going to be certainly a very difficult process but I think it's underway and I think there are differences but there is at the same time I think a common desire of every inhabitant of that European home to seek progress along that way.

SEXTON: Is it so controllable, so inevitable or are there shocks that you can see coming up as we get there?

SUKHODREV: There are bound to be shocks but then again they are shocks of a peaceful nature and the shocks are going to of course involve a change over in economic ties, a change over in the economic systems, a kind of adjustment to each other. Perhaps that would concern Eastern Europe more than it would let's say Western Europe but I think it's bound to affect both sides, both geographical parts of Europe, and we are now talking of geographical parts of Europe not about politically opposite parts of Europe.

MENKES: The new development in Europe I understand will by no means be reflected in the work of the United Nations. There is a new feature in the work of the United Nations, the Soviet/American co-operation, how would you see the reaction of the European countries towards this particular feature?

SUKHODREV: Well, there of course the changes in Eastern Europe have already begun to affect the practical workings of the United Nations. As just one landmark perhaps, and that was in effect a UN history-making event, was the well-known joint resolution submitted by the Soviet Union and the United States last year at the 44th U.N. General Assembly Session. Now I will not go into the details of that resolution, it's well-known enough. I mean the very fact that those two major powers, great powers, came up with that kind of a joint resolution speaks a lot.

LITTLEJOHNS: Essentially that they would co-operate in the United Nations.....

SUKHODREV: Essentially the resolution exactly does call for co-operation between them and between others, between all of the permanent members of the United Nations and all members of this world organization. That is indeed symbolic of of the tremendous changes but there are other changes involved as well. There are changes involving let's say the structure of the pattern of voting. Now the United Nations and the world with it had been accustomed to a certain voting pattern. There was let's say the Western bloc, there was the Eastern bloc and between them what they did was to have a tug-of-war for the votes of the Third World. Now, even at this Session, the 44th Session of the General Assembly, and during the various meetings of other U.N. bodies that kind of pattern is no longer in evidence. Suffice it to say for instance, that on a certain occasion in Geneva during the work of the Commission on Human Rights, countries like the Soviet Union and countries like Bulgaria and Hungary voted in diametrically opposite ways, the Soviet Union let's say voting a nay and the other two voting a yes. That again is a symbol and let's say by way of just another illustration, at the last session there was one issue at one of the committee meetings where the Ukraine abstained where the Soviet Union voted no on a certain specific issue. Now these are perhaps just the more striking examples of the changes in the United Nations. The surprises at times that we are in for, surprises which as times goes on will cease to be surprises and will become the normal work of this Organization where each nation, each member nation I think will simply be proceeding from its own specific interests and not be guided by bloc interests, whether those interests suit them or not.

LITTLEJOHNS: A kinder, gentler United Nations.

SUKHODREV: Yes, I think so.

MENKES: Well, if we speak of a kinder and gentler United Nations what I wanted to ask is this. We are being guided now at the United Nations by the Secretary-General, Javier Pérez de Cuellar, while in fact of the five Secretary-Generals Europe gave us three but in the recent eight years we have been guided by Javier Pérez de Cuellar and with his name the new epoch I'd rather say, either call it that way, in the work of the United Nations. They say that there's a new epoch in the work of the United Nations here, do you see it as a mere coincidence that an expert in the search for compromise and the search for the settlement of the difficult questions, regional conflicts, is leading the United Nations in our particular time?

SUKHODREV: Well, I think that if we look into the history of the United Nations I think we can see that this Organization and its Secretariat has been guided by some very able men, men of really truly worldwide stature and I was fortunate enough to personally know all of them, except for one. Except for Trgyve Lie, I knew all of them starting with Mr. Hammarskjold and I think that if we have at the head of this Organization today a person of the stature, the prestige, the worldwide prestige enjoyed by Mr. Javier Pérez de Cuellar, I think that it is a fortunate coincidence of various circumstances. And I think the Organization is very fortunate to be headed by a person like Mr. Pérez de Cuellar today, a man who has had very broad experience in the political, the foreign policy field and he has been a diplomat who has a had chance to, during his extensive career, come into contact with both Western policies, Third World policies and let's say the policies of my own country, that of the Soviet Union, where he was the first ambassador of Peru ever to present his credentials after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. I think we're very fortunate.

LITTLEJOHNS: The programme is WORLD CHRONICLE. Our guest is Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General on Soviet and East European Affairs.

ZEHM: Mr. Sukhodrev, let me come back to what you said before about the crumbling blocs at the General Assembly. Isn't it so that we still have two blocs or that two new blocs are forming -- rich countries, East and West and the poor countries on the other side?

SUKHODREV: That is quite true and there is let's say not perhaps as yet so much within the halls of the Assembly at official meetings but of course there is a discussion and analyses are being made and certain apprehensions have been voiced and can be heard to the effect that now that there is no longer this tug-of-war between East and West for the votes of the Third World, that with this new coincidence of interests, this new co-operation between East and West, between the Soviet Union and the United States, that that kind of co-operation might proceed at the expense of the Third World. Well, I think that again, because of this newfound spirit of co-operation between East and West, between the USSR and the United States, I think that that will, on the contrary, enable there to be co-operation also in areas which used to be a field for contest between them. That is, in questions relating to economic assistance let's say, in questions relating to socio-economic problems, the debt problem and others. In the past for instance my own country, the Soviet Union, would always say that the poverty of the Third World countries, the former colonies, is entirely the fault of the former colonial empires so it is they who should aid these nations, it is they who should repair the damage that they had done. I think that attitude is no longer there and there is an attempt to come to terms, to achieve consensus on the need for joint action by the entire world

community, let's say to somehow remedy the tremendous debt burden and that is just one out of several issues where progress could be achieved solely by co-operation on a worldwide scale. So I don't think those apprehensions should be valid.

ZEHM: A very different topic. We will probably soon, in a couple of years at the latest, have one Germany where there are now two Germanys in the United Nations and there are quite a few politicians who fear this united Germany its political and economic strength. What role could you see for a united Germany in the United Nations, in the General Assembly?

SUKHODREV: I think that there is indeed a very great role for a united Germany in the General Assembly and in the other bodies of the United Nations and both from the point of view of the economic possibilities that a united Germany would have and its political weight, and I think that even today and let's say in the last couple of years even with the existence of the two Germanys, I think both of them let's say with the new policies pursued by what used to be the Eastern bloc and what is not that anymore, I think there was enough co-operation, there was enough of a spirit of attempting to do things together. I certainly foresee a constructive role for a united Germany in the world community at large and specifically in the U.N. and its General Assembly.

SEXTON: Mr. Sukhodrev, it's taken as a fact nowadays that the big countries are economically interdependent in the sense that the United States can't cut its interest rate because if they did that the Japanese would stop buying bonds and so on and so on. I wonder if we aren't discovering now that there is just as direct a political interdependence? Let me give an example of what I mean. The President of the United States is obviously limited by what he can say about developments

in the Soviet Union on the one hand by public opinion in the United States and on the other hand by the possible effect of what he says in the Soviet Union. By the same token, what President Gorbachev wants to do say in Lithuania is governed on the one hand by opinion and interest within the Soviet Union but at the same time it very definitely seems to be limited by the reaction not only of say the man in the White House in Washington but of public opinion in the United States which bears upon the man in the White House. My question is, how do statesmen pursue straight courses in solving difficult, complicated problems and how do you see in particular President Gorbachev, the president of your country, dealing with balancing these very complicated concerns in producing solutions to the challenges that he has set out to solve, not just in say Lithuania or Estonia or Latvia but in the Ukraine and above all within the Soviet economy as a whole?

SUKHODREV: Well, the phrases you used to preface your question are a nutshell account of President Gorbachev's new thinking. We're all living in a very diversified but interrelated world and that in fact was the sort of starting point if you wish, the whole premise on which he based his new thinking about today's diversified but interdependent and interlinked world so you're quite right in saying there is a need to achieve a balance. You have to think not only about your own immediate interests, the immediate interests of your own country or of your own administration or government but you have to think about the implications of any action taken by any one nation on the world situation as a whole, on the situation in your neighbour's country. So I do think that that is what the two leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States spend a good deal of time talking about is, acting in such a way as to meet their own interests and to have those interests meet the interests of the world at large. That I think should be the highest achievement of political art in today's world.

SEXTON: The highest achievement but the ultimate test is the immediate national interests as perceived by a nation at one time, do you see some kind of a line that would be drawn in say handling the republics and the independence movements in the Soviet Union, a line beyond which any Soviet leader has to say at this point the domestic, national interest overrides all other interests and we have to do what we have to do and where would you say that line is?

SUKHODREV: I think that it is beyond doubt that in measuring or assessing the possible implications of any actions that may be or may be contemplated within the Soviet Union I think that thought is given to the possible implications abroad. That's for sure and as I see it right now and for the future the immediate concern is to see that the constitution, such as it is, the constitution operative today in the Soviet Union, is abided by and at the same time to definitely preclude the use of force, the use of the Army to resolve any ethnic problem and there are many. So of course I think that the overall world situation, the implications of any domestic action on the world scene have to be taken into account, not only in the Soviet Union but by any other nation in the world.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Sukhodrev, we have only about a minute of time left. We started out the programme on a lighter note and we've gotten into some rather heavier stuff, how do you account for the fact that the Soviet Union seems to have such a tremendous reputation in the training of linguists like yourself? You know we hear all the time complaints in the United States and the West about how we're so terrible with foreign languages but you've just proven how excellent the Soviet system is in this area. What's your secret, in the few seconds we have left?

SUKHODREV: Well, it's easy. All you have to do is to spend six years of your childhood in Great Britain, after all the home country of the English language, and I trust my American viewers would not disagree with me on.

LITTLEJOHNS: How did you get your American accent in the meantime?

SUKHODREV: That, well you see regardless of the ups and downs of politics, whether it was cold war or not, most of the political negotiating that I ever took part in was between Soviets and Americans, hence the seven American presidents.

LITTLEJOHNS: That's all the time we have Mr. Sukhodrev. Thank you for joining us on this edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

Our guest has been Victor Sukhodrev, Special Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General on Soviet and East European Affairs. He was interviewed here at United Nations Headquarters in New York by: William Sexton of Newsday; Evgueni Menkes of Tass; and Eckard Zehm of the German Press Agency.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **WORLD CHRONICLE.**

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Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to: **WORLD CHRONICLE,** United Nations, Room S-837, New York, New York 10017, USA.

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